

Decision Memo

Castle Peak Trail Re-route

USDA Forest Service

Aspen-Sopris Ranger District, White River National Forest
Pitkin County, Colorado
Township 12S, Range 85W, Section 15

Decision

I have decided to implement a trail realignment and area restoration project on Castle Peak. This project will define a single route through the snow fields to the Peak's ridge for a total length of approximately 1 mile. The project will include the placement of cairns and trail through the snowfields (0.50 mile) and trail realignment to the northeast ridge approach (0.25); This trail work includes 0.25 mile of minor retainage and back slope retaining that will be constructed to protect against the loss of vegetation above the snow fields and below the ridge. Trail work on the ridge (0.25) will discourage the fall line descent route with the construction of a minor rock barrier.

The objective is to construct a sustainable mountain ascent route, restore multiple user created paths, and perform basic maintenance on the main summit ascent route to Castle Peak. A sustainable route has a logical alignment, is well delineated and easily definable as a route, shows a low rate of change with regular maintenance, is designed to be compatible with side slope grades and soil conditions, has good natural drainage and is constructed to provide a durable surface for current and predicted future use levels.

The peak ascent route will be located to provide a sustainable route for climbers to ascend and descend the mountain, and to minimize impacts to the surrounding fragile high-altitude ecosystem. Route location is integral to minimizing impacts to sensitive areas. Heavily impacted areas and braided routes will be restored. Restoration efforts will focus on utilizing any vegetation that is removed during route construction and closure of user created routes. The route will continue to provide opportunities for challenge and risk; this will be articulated through the design of the re-route by maintaining more difficult and most difficult route standards. The route will continue to be used primarily by day hikers; use by stock will continue to be discouraged

Purpose and Need

The purpose of this project is to protect alpine plant populations and their habitats, stabilize soils, reduce erosion, protect wildlife habitat and provide recreational opportunities which cause minimal damage to the natural resources. This action is needed because resource degradation has occurred due to the absence of a single identifiable route on the peak and the absence of maintenance activities.

Reasons for Categorical Exclusion

I have concluded that this action can be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment as it is a routine activity within an approved category of exclusion under 36 CFR 220.6(e): (1) **Construction and reconstruction of trails** and there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the decision that may result in a significant individual or cumulative effect on the quality of the human environment. The following resource conditions were considered as part of this analysis:

Findings for each of the 7 extraordinary circumstances 36 CFR 220.6(b):

- (i) Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species; A biological survey was prepared and that survey determined there are no anticipated effects to federally listed species that may be present within the project area.
- (ii) Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds are not present in the area.
- (iii) Congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas; The project occurs within the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness. Wilderness regulations will be adhered to throughout project implementation- no motorized or mechanized tools or materials will be used for project implementation.
- (iv) Inventoried roadless area or potential wilderness area; None are present.
- (v) Research natural areas; None are present.
- (vi) American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites; A cultural resource inventory was completed on August 7, 2018, and consultation with the Southern Ute was conducted on August 23, 2018 (during the annual visit) for the proposed project. Forest archaeological staff determined there were no known American Indian religious or cultural sites that will be negatively affected by the implementation of this decision.
- (vii) Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas. The Forest archaeological staff determined that there are no known archaeological or historical sites that will be negatively affected by the implementation of this decision. However, if new archaeological sites are found or located as a result of project implementation, the activity shall cease in the area until Forest archaeological staff evaluated the site and proposes mitigation.

Public Involvement

The proposal was developed in cooperation with the Colorado Fourteeners Initiative and has been in development since 2015. In addition, my Recreation Staff presented the project to WRNF resource specialists at “Small Projects Day” on April 16, 2018. A field visit occurred on August 7, 2018 with CFI representatives, the Region 2 Fourteeners Program Manager, Heritage Program Staff and other staff from the Aspen-Sopris Ranger District. Informal scoping occurred with the Wilderness Workshop on March 3, 2020. Wilderness Workshop concurs with the need for this project. There are no adjacent landowners that will be affected by this project, so no additional scoping occurred.

Findings Required by Other Laws

This decision is consistent with the White River National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) as required by the National Forest Management Act. The Management Area (MA) is designated as Primitive Wilderness 1.12. The project was designed to conform to the Forest Plan. Standards and guidelines will be applied as appropriate to meet Forest Plan goals, objectives, and desired conditions. Maintained trails are present in 1.12 MA. Any construction will incorporate native materials and natural design. Duplicate trails will be eliminated.

This decision is compliant with the Endangered Species Act. A biological survey was conducted, and the determination was that there are no federally listed species known or likely to occur within the project area. This document has been included in the official project record.

This decision is compliant with the National Historic Preservation Act. Forest archaeological staff determined there were no known American Indian religious or cultural sites that will be negatively affected by the implementation of this decision.

Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities

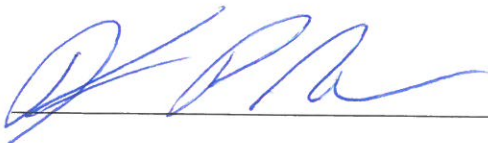
The approved activities within this decision are not subject to appeal in accordance with the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2014, Pub. L. No. 113-76, 128 Stat. 5 (2014). Section 431 of the Act directs that the 1993 and 2012 legislation establishing the 36 CFR 215 (post-decisional appeals) ... "shall not apply to any project or activity implementing a land and resource management plan...that is categorically excluded...under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)."

Implementation Date

This project may be implemented upon signature of this Decision Memo.

Contact Person

For additional information concerning this decision, contact Shelly Grail, Recreation Manager, 970-404-3155; sgrail@fs.fed.us



Kevin Warner
DISTRICT RANGER

5/19/2020

Date

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